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Prime Minister's schedule, February 23

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
February 25, 2009

Night

Arrived at Andrews Air Force Base in a Washington suburb on a government special plane. Stayed overnight at Mandarin Oriental Hotel.

Prime Minister's schedule, February 24

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NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
February 25, 2009

Morning

Held a summit with President Obama at the White House.

4) Aso, Obama agree to strengthen Japan-U.S. alliance

ASAHI (Page 1) (Full)
February 25, 2009

Akihisa Tsugawa, Washington

Prime Minister Taro Aso and U.S. President Barack Obama held their first summit meeting at the White House on the morning of the 24th, local time. The two leaders reaffirmed that the world's two largest economies would further strengthen their alliance and tackle in cooperation a wide range of international challenges, including the financial and economic crisis.

At the outset of the talks, Obama said that the invitation of Aso as his first foreign leader guest is "a testimony to the strong partnership between the U.S. and Japan." He continued: "The U.S.-Japan alliance is the cornerstone of U.S. security policy in East Asia, and my administration hopes to strengthen this alliance." He emphasized: "I think that we have an opportunity to work together, not only on issues related to the Pacific Rim but throughout the world. Japan has become our great partner in dealing with various issues, including climate change and Afghanistan."

In responding to questions from reporters, Obama reiterated: "Japan is the cornerstone of U.S. security policy and a major economic partner."

Aso replied in English: "I feel grateful for your inviting me to the White House as the first official foreign state guest. This is a great honor for me as a Japanese person and also as an Asian. The U.S. and Japan are the world's two largest economies. The two countries should work together hand in hand."

Obama and Aso confirmed the multifaceted nature of the Japan-U.S. alliance to address vital issues in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as global issues. Both are also expected to agree to steadily implement such plans as the transfer of U.S. Marines in Okinawa to Guam and the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan.

In dealing with the ongoing economic crisis, the two leaders agreed to do their utmost to buoy up their domestic economies by such means as economic stimulus measures. They also reaffirmed the need for cooperation in preparation for the financial summit in London on April 2. Obama and Aso also committed themselves to resisting protectionism.

On North Korean, Aso explained Japan's stance of aiming at settling the abduction, nuclear and missile issues in a package and then

called for U.S. cooperation in resolving the abduction issue. On Afghan issues, the two leaders agreed on Japan's participation in the formation of a new U.S. comprehensive strategy. Aso revealed Japan's willingness to offer cooperation in the public welfare area. He seems to have also unveiled that the government is preparing a plan to deploy special envoys in charge of reconstruction assistance

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for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

5) Prime Minister Aso invitation reflects U.S. administration's "distrust" in Ozawa-led DPJ; U.S. applies pressure on security policy

SANKEI (Page 3) (Abridged slightly)
February 25, 2009

Fumito Ishibashi, Washington

U.S. President Barack Obama invited Prime Minister Taro Aso to the White House as the first foreign leader he will meet. Aso, who served as foreign minister under the Koizumi and Abe administrations, has strong communication channels to the U.S. Republican Party but has few ties to the Democratic Party. Despite that, President Obama invited Aso, who is struggling with plummeting support ratings, to the White House ahead of Britain, America's old ally. What is the motive behind it? By introducing Aso internally and externally as his most important partner, (President Obama) seems to be sending a message of "distrust" toward the Democratic Party of Japan, which has a security policy that is difficult to fathom.

In his meeting with Prime Minister Aso on the morning of Feb. 20, UK-Japan 21st Century Group UK Cochairman Rt. Hon Jack Cunningham said ironically, "I understand that the prime minister is going to hold talks with President Obama. We welcome it." It was clear that the upcoming early Japan-U.S. summit has hurt the pride British gentlemen.

The request from the United States for Aso to visit the White House just before the President's State of the Union Address was a bolt from the blue for Japan, as well. President Obama did not place a telephone call to Aso until Jan. 29, after he had already talked to British, French, German, Australian and Middle Eastern leaders. Disappointment spread in the government, with a senior official saying, "The U.S. Democratic Party's propensity to slight Japan has not changed." Some even indicated that it would be an accomplishment just to realize an Aso-Obama meeting before the London financial summit in April.

Instead, President Obama invited Aso at a stage when some of his major cabinet posts remain unfilled. Behind that, there seems to be the judgment that in order to overcome the ongoing economic crisis, there is no other country but Japan, the world's second largest economy, to work with the U.S. as a partner.

Reportedly, Obama's priority shift to Japan owes much to such officials as his National Security Advisor James Jones, a retired U.S. Marine Corps four-star general who also served in Okinawa, and Kurt Campbell, a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asian and Pacific Affairs who is well-versed in Japanese affairs.

But the prevailing view is that they do not necessarily have positive opinions about the Aso administration and that (Obama's invitation of Aso) is a reversal of his concern over the Ichiro Ozawa-led DPJ.

In the U.S. government, there is mistrust in the DPJ which is opposed to the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean and is calling for moving Futenma Air Station out

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of Okinawa and a review of the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement. In August 2007, Ozawa said in his meeting with then U.S.

Ambassador to Japan J. Thomas Schieffer: "We cannot send troops to places that are not directly connected with Japan's peace and security and conduct joint operations." This, too, seems to have augmented U.S. concern.

Reportedly, Campbell and others visited Japan last December and met with persons connected with the DPJ and concluded as a result that the DPJ was still split over its security policy. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also met with Ozawa seemingly to size him up.

There are Japan experts in the Obama administration, but there are not many pro-Japan experts. The first Aso-Obama meeting ended amicably. There is a possibility, however, that the U.S. government will ask Japan for enormous monetary and human contributions for the war on terror and other areas. Prime Minister Aso intends to find ways to invigorate his administration with proactive foreign and security policies based on the Japan-U.S. alliance by taking such wishes of the United States into consideration.

6) Government accelerating diplomacy encircling North Korea

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
February 25, 2009

The government is accelerating high-level diplomacy with six-party talks member nations with the exception of North Korea, starting with the Japan-U.S. summit on February 24. The move has a strong nature of being intended to encircle North Korea in conjunction with U.S. Secretary of State Clinton's policy of attaching with importance to the six-party talks, which she advocated during her recent tour of Asia. North Korea on the 24th released a statement hinting at a plan to launch a long-range ballistic missile. Tense diplomatic bargaining is continuing.

Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone during a press conference on the 24th revealed that he will visit Beijing on March 1 to meet with Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi. They are expected to exchange views on pending issues, such as the poisoned gyoza dumpling case, and the North Korea issue. Nakasone successively held meetings with his South Korean counterpart on the 11th and his U.S. counterpart on the 17th. Prime Minister Aso met with President Medvedev in Sakhalin, Russia.

It is unusual for Japan to hold talks with the Russian leader and foreign ministers of the U.S., China and South Korea in such a short period of time. It has thus tacitly applied pressure on Pyongyang, which pins hopes on bilateral talks with the U.S. instead of the six-party talks.

However, far from giving in, Pyongyang is increasingly strengthening its confrontational stance.

It in a statement released on the 24th revealed that preparations were under way to launch an experimental communications satellite. This recalls its launching of the Taepodong-1 missile, which passed over Japan and came down in the Pacific Ocean in August 1998. At that time, Pyongyang announced that it was only an artificial satellite.

North Korea appears to be preparing to launch the Taepodong-2 or its

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improved version. If it goes ahead with the test launch, ignoring warnings from various countries, it would become a major threat to Japan, which is even within range of the intermediate-range ballistic missile Nodong 1.

A government official took a bullish stance, saying: "If they want to launch it, do it. They know what will happen, if they do it." However, there are, in fact, no signs that six-party talks on settling the missile issue are in the works.

7) Prime Minister Aso to visit China in late March; such issues as environmental technology high on agenda

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)

February 25, 2009

The government has launched coordination on a plan for Prime Minister Taro Aso to visit China in late March. It is considering meetings between Aso and President Hu Jintao and between Aso and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. Aso visited China last October to attend the summit meeting of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). China is expected to invite Aso in March to Beijing as a state guest, a first time for him.

When President Hu visited Japan last May, the governments of Japan and China agreed to start a protocol of mutual visits by their top leaders.

Such issues as Japan's provision of environmental technologies to prevent global warming will likely be high on the agenda.

Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone will visit Beijing on Feb. 28 and March 1 to arrange a schedule for a Japan-China summit. Nakasone is expected to meet with his Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi to exchange views so that the two countries will be able to promote a strategic reciprocal relationship in concrete terms. The two foreign ministers will likely also discuss the joint exploration of gas reserves in the East China Sea and the food security issue, including a series of food-poisoning cases involving Chinese-made frozen dumplings. Nakasone is considering meeting also with President Hu and Premier Wen.

8) Agreement on transfer of U.S. marines submitted to Diet

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
February 25, 2009

The government on February 24 submitted an item to the Diet calling for its approval of the signing of the Japan-U.S. agreement that bans the use of Japanese outlays for purposes other than the relocation of U.S. marines from Okinawa to Guam.

The relocation is part of the U.S. forces Japan realignment. U.S. Secretary of State Clinton and Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone signed the agreement on Feb. 17, when Clinton visited Japan. The government is aiming at having the agreement approved quickly from the standpoint of strengthening the bilateral alliance. However, Diet deliberations will likely to be tumultuous, with the opposition camp, which has a majority of seats in the Upper House, toughening its confrontational stance against the government.

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) is opposed to the agreement,

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arguing that the cost of the construction of U.S. military housing following the transfer of the Marines is too high.

9) To avoid split in the party, DPJ to vote against U.S. Marine relocation treaty, citing burden of picking up the cost

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Excerpts)
February 25, 2009

The government presented to the Diet on Feb. 24 a measure approving the Japan-U.S. agreement that would relocate U.S. Marines on Okinawa to Guam. In response, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) has taken a stance of opposing the treaty because the Japanese government is picking up the cost and because the party has problems with the plan to realign the U.S. forces in Japan. Although there are voices of approval within the DPJ who worry that the party's capability of running the government would be questioned (if it opposes the move), the judgment was ultimately reached, based on the next election, that it would not be wise policy if the party split over this issue.

The bilateral agreement was signed during the recent meeting of Foreign Minister Nakasone and Secretary of State Clinton. In order to move to Guam 8,000 U.S. Marine troops and their 9,000 family members by 2014, Japan would issue fiscal disbursements limited to no more than \$2.8 billion (or approximately 250 billion yen).

10) U.S. Navy presence alone enough: Ozawa

SANKEI (Page 3) (Full)
February 25, 2009

Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) President Ichiro Ozawa clarified his views yesterday regarding the issue of realigning U.S. forces in Japan, indicating that the forces of the U.S. Navy alone would be enough for the future U.S. military presence in Japan. "For the United States to forward station troops at this time is meaningless," Ozawa said. "In the sense of military strategy, the Seventh Fleet alone is enough for the U.S. presence in the Far East," he added.

In addition, Ozawa also said: "As for the rest, Japan should undertake its role for its national security and play its role in the Far East. I think they will understand this." With this, Ozawa implied plans to realign and reduce the presence of U.S. military bases in Japan through such measures as cooperating on United Nations activities after his party takes office. He was replying to a question asked by a reporter in Kashiba, Nara Prefecture.

Ozawa stressed: "Japan should not always be at the beck and call of the United States. Instead, we, too, should have an appropriate global strategy. Japan should do more to share the role at least for matters related to Japan. If we do so, the United States' role will decrease." Meanwhile, Japan has now entered into an agreement with the United States to relocate Okinawa-based U.S. Marines to Guam, and the government has asked the Diet for its approval of the pact. The question is whether the DPJ will agree to this pact. Asked about this, Ozawa avoided clarifying his view, saying, "I want you to ask about specifics after we take office."

In its manifesto for the 2007 House of Councillors election, the DPJ took the position that the party would study the U.S. military

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presence for security in the Asia-Pacific region and how to position U.S. military bases in Japan.

11) Gov't to allow firing on pirate ships under current law

SANKEI (Page 3) (Full)
February 25, 2009

The government has now ordered the Maritime Self-Defense Force to prepare for an antipiracy mission in waters off the eastern African coast of Somalia by invoking an action for maritime security operations under the Self-Defense Forces Law. Concerning its guidelines for the MSDF to use weapons, the government decided yesterday to allow the MSDF to fire on pirate ships in case they refused orders to stop. The government will also allow the MSDF to fire at pirates attempting to get into commercial ships. Based on this course of action, the government will not ease its guidelines for weapons use or the so-called rules of engagement (ROE) in its planned antipiracy legislation. The government plans to present an antipiracy bill to the Diet during the first half of March. In addition, the new legislative measure also allows the MSDF to provide foreign naval vessels engaged in antipiracy operations with water and fuel on a reimbursable basis.

The government plans to invoke an action in early March for maritime security operations and send out two MSDF destroyers. In the case of maritime security operations, however, weapons use is allowed under the currently existing police duty execution law in conformity with its Article 7 provisions. In this case, weapons use is limited to legitimate self-defense or emergency evacuation only. The MSDF is currently allowed to fire on pirate ships only if and when the pirates fire first. Concerned about this constraint, the Defense Ministry sought to ease the government's weapons use guidelines.

However, the Cabinet Secretariat, which is now drafting the new law, judged that the MSDF can be allowed to fire on pirate ships before they fire in order to stop them or for other purposes even in the case of legitimate self-defense or emergency evacuation prescribed

in the police duty execution law. In concrete terms, the MSDF will be allowed to fire on a pirate ship in the case where that pirate ship, refusing orders to stop and closing in on a commercial ship, does not halt after warning shots were fired into the skies and even after further warning shots were fired into the water near the pirate ship.

The Cabinet Secretariat also judged that the MSDF will be allowed to fire at pirates if and when they rope up a commercial ship in an attempt to get into the commercial ship.

In the case of the new law's weapons use standards as well, the government will therefore allow the MSDF to use weapons in conformity with the police duty execution law's Article 7 provisions as in the case of maritime security operations. Furthermore, the new law will allow the MSDF to escort foreign ships irrelevant to Japan. In addition, the new law, if approved by the ruling parties, will also prescribe international contributions to allow supplying foreign naval vessels on antipiracy missions with fuel and water on a reimbursable basis. In this case, the government is planning to use an MSDF supply ship currently deployed to the Indian Ocean.

12) Anti-piracy legislation to allow use of weapons against pirates; Police law to be applied

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MAINICHI (Page 2) (Abridged)
February 25, 2009

Yasushi Sengoku

The outline of the anti-piracy bill the government is planning to submit to the Diet in early March has been revealed. The legislation is designed to apply the Police Duties Execution Law to allow the use of weapons to stop piracy, which is not allowed under the maritime policing action provision of the Self-Defense Forces Law. In the SDF's overseas missions in the past, the use of weapons has been allowed only in self-defense and emergency evacuation so as not to constitute the use of force, which is prohibited under the Constitution. The step that will effectively relax the weapons-use criteria is likely to spark controversy.

The anti-piracy legislation envisages not only the Maritime Self-Defense Force's mission in waters off Somalia, for which the government is expected to issue an order before long, but also activities in other oceanic areas as well. The legislation will be a permanent law without any time limit. The scope of protection will be expanded to include foreign ships, in addition to Japanese vessels. Coast guards are to play a main role in clamping down on pirates and the SDF is to play a supplementary role in the event the Japan Coast Guard finds it difficult to handle.

For the use of weapons, Article 7 of the Police Duties Execution Law will be applied. Under this article, a police officer is allowed to use weapons in self-defense, emergency evacuation, and against a resisting individual suspected to have committed a heinous crime. The application of the law allows the use of weapons to fire at a pirate ship that did not follow an order to stop.

The government plans to issue an order in early March to dispatch the MSDF on an anti-piracy mission in waters off Somalia under the maritime policing action provision.

But under this provision, protection is limited to Japanese-registered ships and vessels carrying Japanese cargoes. Once the anti-piracy legislation is enacted, the government intends to shift the law authoring the SDF dispatch to the new legislation.

Difficulties are expected for the enactment of the new legislation that involves constitutional discussions under the extremely unpopular Aso administration.

13) Mainichi opinion poll finds 47 PERCENT of public approving dispatch of MSDF for anti-piracy mission, outweighing those who are against

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
February 25, 2009

The Mainichi Shimbun, in a (telephone-based) opinion survey carried out nationwide Feb. 21-22, found that 47 PERCENT of public approved and 42 PERCENT opposed the government's dispatching of the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) for anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia in Africa. Eleven percent had no answer to the question.

Breaking down the respondents by gender, 60 PERCENT of males approved and another 34 PERCENT disapproved. But only 34 PERCENT

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of women approved, with 50 PERCENT disapproving. Based on political parties, 65 PERCENT of Liberal Democratic Party supporters approved, and only 26 PERCENT disapproved. The New Komeito supporters were comparably close, with 51 PERCENT approving and 44 PERCENT disapproving. Both the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party were overwhelming against the MSDF dispatch, but the Democratic Party of Japan supporters were evenly split, 46 PERCENT supportive and 45 PERCENT opposed.

14) DPJ to allow ruling camp to take vote on fiscal 2009 budget on Feb. 27 in Lower House plenary session

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)
February 25, 2009

The main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) decided yesterday in an executive meeting on a policy of coordinating views with other opposition parties in order to vote down this week in the House of Councillors bills related to the second supplementary budget for fiscal 2008, designed to secure fiscal resources for the cash-handout program. The DPJ also decided yesterday to allow the ruling parties to take a vote on the fiscal 2009 budget, which the House of Representatives is now deliberating, on Feb. 27 in a Lower House plenary session.

The ruling coalition is expected to readopt the bills related to the fiscal 2008 second extra budget by a two-thirds lower chamber overriding vote, after they are voted down in the opposition-controlled Upper House. The DPJ intended to vote them down last week, but it put off its plan to take a vote following former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's remarks on Feb. 12 that he would not approve the use of a two-thirds overriding vote.

A senior DPJ member said: "Even if a second vote is delayed, the number of LDP lawmakers to fall in line with Koizumi will not increase." In an attempt to avoid public criticism of dragging out deliberations, the DPJ decided to vote them down next week (in the Upper House).

Regarding the reason for the DPJ's decision to allow the ruling camp to take a vote on the fiscal 2009 budget, Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Kenji Yamaoka said: "Once the budget is enacted, there will be discord in the LDP." However, three other opposition parties -- the Japanese Communist Party, Social Democratic Party, and People's New Party -- raised objections to the DPJ's policy of taking a vote as early as possible. The DPJ is expected to hold a meeting today of the Diet affairs committee chairs of the opposition parties in order to get their approval.

15) DPJ to refuse to accept cash handout

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
February 25, 2009

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) on February 24 decided to call on its member lawmakers to refuse the acceptance of flat-sum cash handouts incorporated in the fiscal 2008 supplementary budget. Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama will send a notification on the decision to all DPJ members before the end of the week. Some took the view that such a decision should be made by each member. However, the party has decided to urge member lawmakers to act in unity in view of the circumstance that it has lashed out at the cash

handout scheme in Diet debates.

The party will let local members make up their mind on their own. However, it will give consideration in order to prevent a situation in which local assemblies dominated by DPJ-affiliated members vote down their supplementary budget bill to finance the cost of the distribution of benefits, making it impossible for the residents of such municipalities alone to receive the benefits, from occurring.

16) Cabinet adopts written response stipulating that it will not correct Aso's remark that World War II began with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
February 25, 2009

The government yesterday adopted a written response in a cabinet meeting that it would not correct Prime Minister Aso's remark that World War II began with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Aso stated this during an interview (Dec. 12, 2008) for the ninth issue of his cabinet's mail magazine. The cabinet approved the written response, which was a reply to a question posed by New Party Nippon representative Yasuo Tanaka.

The theme of the interview was about Japan ten years from now. Aso stated in it:

"Nobody probably can predict things that will occur ten years from now.....World War II began with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. At that time, there was nobody who was able to imagine that Japan and the United States would conclude a bilateral security treaty 10 years later."

The government's written response says that (Aso) referred to Japan-U.S. relations in pre- and post-war periods in order to explain how difficult it was to predict the state of Japan ten years from now. The written response avoided making a direct response to Tanaka's question.

World War II began with the declaration of war by Britain and France against the German invasion of Poland in September 1939. Aso appears to have mistaken the start of World War II with the outbreak of war between Japan and the United States. Tanaka severely criticized Aso in his memorandum.

ZUMWALT